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CONSERVING CHILDHOOD

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It is yet to be proved that a wide-open democracy like ours can do some of the things which a well-ordered political society needs to have done, as well as more centralized forms of government do them with apparent ease. Indeed, it is yet to appear that we can make good the fundamental principle of our political creed and assure *equality* of right and opportunity to every one. Of course, there are compensations for the fact, but it *is* a fact.

The door of opportunity opens wider here than in any other nation in the world. The passion of the United States is that every one shall have his chance. We provide primary, secondary and higher instruction practically free of cost to all. The teaching is efficient and the equipment is ample, often sumptuous. The spirit that supports it all is delightful. The school budget is the one tax of which no good American has the hardihood to complain. The road to and through and between the schools is a broad highway. It has no breaks and no very heavy grades. No sect, no party, no social set, no commercial interest, is allowed to obstruct it. So much is settled and everywhere accepted. It is more than settled and accepted. Wealth, society, business, religion and political sagacity find their security and their pleasure in continually enlarging and strengthening the educational ideal.

The road to accomplishment and to fame is as open and as free as that to the schools. Education is not only the universal American passion, but hope, cheer, courage are the words which the most beautiful and brilliant flag in the world whispers in the ears of all, native born or adopted, who live where it casts its shadow. A national temperament which is being warmed by the intermingling of the blood, the experiences and the ideals of all the peoples of the world; which has been ennobled by the constantly enlarging opportunities and continually increasing influence of women; which has been incited by innumerable individual successes, and which has been made very confident, if not very vain, by the always

unfolding magnificence of the governmental plan, is stirred to its very depths by the opportunities and the inspirations of the American Republic. The millions who are mature enough to feel it, and who have not been borne down by conditions which are well nigh insuperable, are struggling, in season and out of season, to make the most of it. The spectacle is brilliant enough to stir the wonder, if not the jealousy, of the world. Nothing short of the *Gloria in excelsis* can express our heartfelt appreciation of it all.

Would that there were no word of qualification nor ground for apprehension. But there is, and we are old enough and strong enough to look each other in the face and say it. Our general characterization expresses great and proud truths, and perhaps the larger part of the whole truth, but still it is only a part of the whole truth. The undisclosed part is that we count a mere opening for some as the equal chance for all. It is not so; one must be helped to a place where he may enter the door of opportunity, before he has any share in the equal chance for all. Leaving further applications of the principle to be made by others, it is my mission to this Conference to say that all American children must be given the implements with which to make their way in our busy civilization before it can be said that our political system is sufficiently efficient or that equality of chance is held out to every one.

Fifty years ago we were discussing just such a question as this, and the great Lincoln, right here in the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois, was piercing the fallacy that political freedom covered the right to do wrong. Senator Douglas, a very great man, was saying that the territories should have free constitutions and be left to vote slavery up or down, according to their inclinations; but the greatest of all Illinoisans and the greatest of all Americans answered, "No, that is but temporizing with an inherent wrong." It would be logical, he said, if slavery were ever right, but for one man to claim the right to eat his bread in the sweat of another man's brow, save as the result of free contract or pursuant to bad laws already duly enacted, was essentially immoral. Slavery might be tolerated for a time where it was established by law, because even that might be better than a fratricidal war which might sever the union of the states and present an insuperable obstacle to a further democratic advance; but freedom was to be voted up and slavery must be voted down by the common action of a free nation, when

it came to territory that was already free. The people saw the point, and used the man to carry the great principle to a consummation which saved the nation.

Slavery to ignorance is no less slavery than the slavery of a serf to an overlord. It is the inherent right of the American child to be or to become free from both. The possession of at least the elementary powers to read and write, by which he may gain knowledge and make the most of himself, is an essential part of his freedom. Such possession by all the people of a free country is the country's most valuable property. It is the property of all. Every one under a free constitution has just as much of a property interest in the literacy and the efficiency of every other as he has in the performance of any other legal or moral compact. No one can waive it for himself, through his youth or his ignorance, because of the mutuality of all the obligations of the universal compact. He cannot lose it by misfortune for which he is not responsible. If he is incapable of asserting the right for himself, the legal organization set to enforce the terms of the compact is bound to enforce it for him. The right of every one to read is not to be voted up or down, as a city, a county, a district or a parent may please to vote. This is essentially so in a democracy, and more particularly in a democracy with ideals like ours. The illiteracy of an American citizen whose childhood has been passed in America is unlawful and essentially immoral. Education, an essential of freedom, is always to be voted up and everywhere enforced in a republic.

These are not idle words. In America, where we offer more education to every citizen than does any other country in the world, there are more people who cannot read or write in any language than there are in any other constitutional country in the world. The attendance upon the primary schools is less complete and regular than in any other well-ordered nation upon the globe. In Chicago or New York there is a much larger percentage of people ten years old or more who can neither read nor write than there is in London, or Paris, or Berlin, or Zurich, or Copenhagen, or even Tokio.

Illiteracy is almost a negligible quantity in the German Empire, in France, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries and even in Japan. As I was preparing this address I had the pleasure of a call from Dr. Koht, professor of modern history in the University of

Christania. I asked him how many children there were in the Scandinavian countries, ten years old, who could neither read nor write. He said *not any*. He seemed surprised at the question. In the state of New York there are fifty-five in a thousand, and in Illinois forty-two in a thousand.

It is easily explained. The immigration is an inadequate explanation. Immigrants from the highly or uniformly educated nations go far to offset those from the peoples where education is less diffused. Immigrants are often more jealous than native Americans of their opportunities in the schools. They more commonly settle in the cities, where the schools are convenient and where all the people are accustomed to some measure of compulsion, than in the country. There is a larger percentage of illiterate children of native born than of foreign born parents in the state of New York. This statement is also true of Illinois. There is often a larger percentage of illiteracy in the country than in the cities. The explanation is not a very complacent one. It is in the fact that we know little of national economics; that we have not acquired the habit of taking care, and particularly in the fact that we have a popular conception of freedom which does not include the vital necessity of proper restraint and compulsion as to all. It is because of our unfortunate disposition to let people do as they please, upon condition that they let us do as we please. It is because we are so indifferent in our self-confidence, so willful, resourceful and optimistic.

Probably no one will deny that we have as complete a system of school attendance and child-labor laws in New York as in any state. They are not complete, but are measurably so for America. They are harmonious. The Labor and Education Departments are in accord. It looks as though the labor laws are very well enforced. Behind them there are strong, influential and determined bodies of citizens—the labor organizations, who have direct interest in the execution of the laws which prescribe the ages, the hours and all of the conditions where many people work together. These organizations not only enforce the laws, but they create sentiment. Even the execution of the laws of itself makes sentiment. Direct interest gives energy and strength to the arm of the law. Even those people who have no direct interest and who do not think much about it, get into the habit of thinking that what happens all of the time ought to happen.

School attendance laws are without organized help. Sentiment is quite indifferent. Indeed, there is a not uncommon feeling that it is below the dignity of the state to be hunting up little children to make them go to school, and quite apart from the proper feelings of the well-to-do to be punishing poor or unworthy parents for not keeping their children in school. This feeling is much more common in the country and in smaller towns than in the larger cities. But it exists everywhere. The officers of the law look upon the enforcement of school laws as beyond their realm. The police very nearly revolt against it. The local magistrates refuse to impose punishments. It is not strange; it is not wholly unworthy; they have sympathy, and they deal with so much squalor and with what seems to them so much more serious matters, that they are glad to take a promise and let the thing go. Sometimes they are thinking about votes at the next election, but oftener they are simply expressing the very common feeling of indifference of the country. The execution of the school laws is largely left to school officers, and, without the interested aid of the officers charged with the enforcement of the penal laws, the school officers are pretty nearly helpless. The mercury which measures American public sentiment upon enforcing school attendance is well down to the freezing point. Legislators dislike to add to the efficiency of attendance laws, and governors are even more reluctant to suggest discipline upon subordinate officers, who persistently refuse to make them effective. In other words, we have the disadvantages as well as the advantages of democracy.

If our country were simply one great business corporation, with "no body to be kicked and no soul to be damned," which was expecting to continue indefinitely and was always looking for profits, its officers would do all they could to enlarge the efficiency of boys and girls, because they would know that such efficiency was the thing above all others to reinforce life and assure the repetition of dividends. If we had a king whom we sustained in the delusion or pretence that he was a sort of father to us all, he would be likely to follow courses to enlarge our productivity, without letting any of us get out of what he conceived to be our proper places, because productivity would be translated into revenues. If our country were an empire, bounded by rival empires, and likely at any time to have to fight for territory and for life, things would be arranged to make each of us contribute to the military power of the empire. Intel-

lectual acumen, versatility, craftsmanship, the working habit, are larger factors than mere physical strength in the constituent elements of military power. If our country were a constitutional monarchy or even a republic where thought and political power were not very free; where there was an inherited autocracy and superimposed aristocracy, with a false "culture" which inbreeding was degrading into insipidity, every one of us would be used for what there was in us to hold up the props which support the roofs.

Our scheme of government is not like that of any other people. Our thinking and our outlook are peculiar to ourselves. We have shown that we can govern ourselves. We have shown that in infinite and overwhelming ways our plan is stable and secure enough, and our ways open the door of opportunity to the individual and the mass. The great heart of our nation is not yearning for aristocracy or empire or military power. It does not even want a kind or a measure of learning that is not in equilibrium and in sympathy with work. We want to bear a great nation's honorable and instructive part in the progress of the world. Beyond what good neighborliness and good morals impose, we do not wish to meddle with the affairs of other peoples. We do not wish them to do more concerning our affairs. As they do not seem so disposed and as no one suspects that we would allow it if they did, there is no occasion to bluster about it. But in the interests of neighborliness and good morals we have some lessons to learn, as well as some to impart.

We do not believe in the Government using the people, but we do believe in the people using the Government. We would use this Government for a double purpose—to keep us all in good legal and moral relations with all the world, and to assure peace, security, equality of right and the utmost of opportunity to every soul in the republic. All that is inbred in us, but there is one thing that is not, and that is regard for common possessions and responsibility for the brother who is in bonds. It would, of course, be absurd to say that this is true of all of us, because those among us who have been the most successful in business have commonly become our noblest benefactors, and because vital occasions always develop a moral sense which may be counted upon. But it is not too much to say that, with all of our opportunities and all of our encouragement, there is no national policy and no national conscience in America which uses the authority of the nation to universalize and conserve the efficiency of men and women.

We are a wasteful people. We have never studied economy. We have never acquired the habit of taking care. Other peoples would live sumptuously out of the difference between what they would get and what we do get out of our properties. We know nothing of the potentiality of our resources. When we fall short we start out to find new fields rather than to find ways for increasing the productivity of old fields. Unhappily, loose habits react upon ourselves. They actually make us profligate of our boys and girls.

Just now we are enjoying a little breeze of prudence about natural resources. For once the statesmen and the orators and the magazines and the newspapers are *en rapport* with the professors of economics and the political economists generally, to make us more saving of wood and water and coal and oil and iron than we are. The agricultural colleges are telling us how to get more out of our lands, and admonishing us that if we don't treat them better and use more fertilizers they will stop yielding their fruits in season. We do more to conserve wild animals than tame ones. All the states are protecting moose and deer and fish and wild chickens. In New York we have taken up the cause of chipmunks and woodchucks, and would have done it for wolverines and gophers and badgers and prairie dogs if there were any. Such a wave of prudence is as exhilarating and encouraging as it is unprecedented and timely in America. When we get started in conserving we are likely to do a great deal of it. Surely we will not stop at the border line of human interest, and when the issue comes to be a moral one we will not forever hesitate at the point where it is necessary to compel people to do some things as well as not to do other things.

Resources alone can never provide the ballast necessary to the equipoise of a nation. The vital factors in a nation's existence, to say nothing of a nation's beneficence and moral progress, are human. In the economics of nation building the overwhelming concern will have to be about boys and girls. In all history, men and women have overcome scarcity of resources and difficulties of situation. There are compensations in the economics of God. Strong and sane peoples have used slender resources and hard situations to work out overwhelming results. Unsubstantial and frivolous peoples have been overcome by the very plentitude of materials and the very advantage of situation. Great peoples have made themselves the greater by overcoming the hardness of situation. But no

people has ever grown great unless tradition or the force of circumstances or intellectual prescience was larger than the material factors in the compounding of its future. Poverty or a sufficiency, rather than inordinate wealth, helps nations as well as individual men and women.

We are wealthy in natural resources. In woods and waters and mines we are a "millionaire" nation. We have no conception of the potential possibilities of our boundless areas of tillable lands, for we have never had to make the most of them. We hold a low estimate of the possibilities of domestic animals. We do not realize the wealth that is yet in our mountains. We have even less appreciation of the associated worth of our hills and valleys and lowlands; of our lakes and streams and cascades; of the rains and dews that nourish us, and of the climate that stimulates us to make the most of material things. We have endless coasts washed by the two great oceans; deep, sheltered harbors in all latitudes, and the busy highways of the nations are and must ever be across the lands and waters that are under our flag.

But we have more than wealth of natural resources. History, tradition, severe fighting for freedom, the hard struggles of pioneers, much thinking and strong moral purpose have been the warp, as much as the wealth of a new continent has been the woof, of our civilization. There was something in the blood of our fathers; there is something in the blood which all the nations are continually sending to us; something in the compounding of the English nation, and something more in the compounding of the American nation; something in the factors which have produced, and something in the results which have grown out of the steady advance of religious and political freedom through a thousand years, to make us a keen, quick, alert and ambitious people. This in turn is disclosing our enormous natural wealth. It is disclosing our cunning, our avarice, our pertinacity, also. Is our political system going to be equal to the new strains which the new situations put upon it? We have no doubt of it. But there is enough about it all to challenge the wisdom of the generation that is here, and to quicken the red blood of the one that is coming on.

"Conserving natural resources," if not an American phrase, has an American meaning. It describes a movement to stop a few great characters, through a few overpowering corporations to which

we have delegated much of the power which belongs to all of us in common, from getting our common possessions into their own hands, or from despoiling great inheritances which have come to us in common. This does not necessarily mean anything against these great characters; most of us admire most of them. Often they are as great in their patriotism and in their rational generosity as in their business sagacity. It means nothing, essentially, against the corporations. Their development of resource has been a necessary force in the development of a new country. It means merely that the time has come for a little more assertion of common rights in common property. It is more against a further absorption that is coming to amount to sequestration of our goods, than against a national profligacy that has not yet put us in sore straits. The outcome of so much of "conservation" seems hopeful. Certainly it is grateful. But it is to be feared that greater prudence in the use of whatever goods each of us can lawfully gather will not seize upon us until we are in a tighter pinch than now.

With all of our national wastefulness we are more profligate of childhood than of any other factor in the nation's life. We are not only lax about requiring attendance upon the schools, but we have pretty nearly given over the control and direction of children who live at home and exist in the regular order. The common authority presumes too much upon the proper exercise of the authority of parents. It does not take into account the number of parents who are so vicious or weak that they have no right to have children, or the number of unfortunate children who would be better off if they were orphans. And, largely through the influence of a sentimentalism that is fully half bad, the children in three-quarters of the better homes and in the schools are given their own sweet way to an extent which weakens their characters for life.

We cannot exculpate the schools. They are as wasteful of child life as are the homes. From the bottom to the top of the American educational system we take little account of the time of the child. We are anxious to do everything under the sun, and to put into the young head of a child all that he is ever expected to know. The sentimental and well-meaning people load everything upon us. So we have eight or nine elementary grades for work which would be done in six if we were working mainly for productivity and power. We have shaped our secondary schools so that

they confuse the thinking of youth and break the equilibrium between education and vocations and people and industries. Our university facilities divide up the time of students between their departments with as much enthusiasm as a young surgeon goes at an autopsy. The departments get what they must have to sustain themselves and the subjects get the consequences of it. They pay for it in time or in attenuated courses and unremunerated work. The training is for the professions, and if the universities are let alone the students will not be ready for life before they are thirty years of age. That keeps young people unmarried and unsettled too long, and it works havoc in life in obvious ways.

In the graded elementary schools of the state of New York less than half of the children remain to the end of the course. They do not start early enough. They do not attend regularly enough. The course is too full of mere pedagogical method, exploitation and illustration, if not of kinds and classes of work. The terms are too short and the vacations too long. It all overworks and worries teachers, so that to live at all, they have to have short terms. More than half the children drop out by the time they are fourteen or fifteen, the limits of the compulsory attendance age, because the work of the schools is behind the age of the pupils and we do not teach them the things which lead them and their parents to think it will be worth their while to remain.

The compulsory attendance age should begin at six, or at seven at the most, and the course should be freed from everything not of fundamental importance to the early training of a child. I am not for going back to the simple work of a half-century ago. I am quite aware of the fact that the child is to live in a complex civilization. But I am sure that there is no need to teach him, before he is fourteen years of age, everything that it may ever be well for him to know. I am quite sure that it is desirable to induce society to expend its devotion to culture upon the school grounds and the schoolhouse, and leave the children to bathe in the sunlight of these things while the teachers are allowed to train them in the things they must know in order to be self-supporting and a support to the state. I am no less sure that the multiplicity of books and appliances and the endless exploitation and illustration in the teaching may well be severely reduced. It is not often a question of what or how it may be well to teach a child if the element of time is not to be

considered; generally it is a question of what we can teach him before he is fourteen years old that will be of most worth to him in after years.

There is another side of this subject that is staring right at us. That is the unpreparedness of children for any vocation which is not literary or professional; the undue public and school influence upon ambitious temperaments to choose mental rather than manual work; and the utter indifference of the educational system in the past to the intellectual and industrial equilibrium of the country.

Now, I am not saying or implying that a poor boy shall not enter a profession or aspire to any position in the land. That is for him to settle. The roads are to be open to every child, no matter under what sort of a roof he is born. There is not only one road, but many, and he is not to be persuaded by always present injunctions and implications to enter one particular road when there is grave doubt about it being the best one for him. All the roads are to be made good, and his all-around qualities are to be trained until he sees the road which seems the best to himself.

The finest successes come not so much from learning as from doing, and an educational system which does not recognize that fact and act up to it needs radical reforming. The conspicuous successes in life do not attend those who are the star students upon commencement morning more than those who find something that they can do and who do it with all their might. I have been surprised at the number of college men who gain success, although for one reason or another they left college without a degree. The captains are those who can command. We have been trying to impose upon labor a leadership which was not accustomed to labor and did not know any too much about the details of labor. We have trained for culture and for expertness and for examinations. It is time to train for craftsmanship, and let *workmen* of character and efficiency forge to the front. They will do it even though the signals are set against them, or else there will be little accomplishment and small progress. Why not arrange the scheme so as to make it easier for them to do it?

If we are to do anything substantial in the way of conserving American childhood, we will have to control it. We will have to insure its attendance upon instruction, and we will have to train it to efficiency of hand even more than smartness of head. Character

will come out of labor before competency will come out of mere culture of mind. How long shall we proceed upon the fundamental mistake that there is any culture worth the name which does not grow out of work, or any real manliness or womanliness which has not proceeded from things that have been done? I am not saying that necessarily the things done must have been done by the hand, but I do think that the culture is likely to be deeper and the character the stronger if the things done have been done in the sweat of the brow.

We need a new order of public schools, a system on parallel lines with the literary high schools, a system which will train in hand work and which will not assume to train captains, but workmen; a system which will permit no short cuts to the position of master workmen, but will fit for that of journeyman in shorter time. We need a system which will stand fair between every interest of all the people; a system which will do definite things and open the door of opportunity to a multitude against whom it is now closed, a system which will dignify hand labor and go a long way to restore the balance which we have been losing, to the diminution of our efficiency and therefore, of our happiness at home, as well as to the injury of our trade relations with the other nations of the world.

Of course, the people whose feelings are expressed in this notable assemblage need no other argument than the exclusively moral one to quicken their interest in the conservation of American childhood. It has been the political assumption of the Republic that none other is necessary. But it must begin to be evident that even the economic interests of an empire, even the apprehensions and aspirations of the man on horseback, may go further than the moral sense of a democracy must necessarily go to make an elementary training of the children universal. Something beyond the open chance, and something beyond our encouragement and good wishes, will have to operate if we are to conserve the youth of the United States and steadily advance the efficiency, and therefore the character, the happiness and the prosperity of the country. We will have to have an always up-to-date enrollment of every child in the land, and some responsible central authority will have to see that every one gets that fundamental training in useful things, which, under the theories of all respectable governments is his in his own right, and which the manifest interests of every country inexorably demand that he shall have.

As already observed; when we really commence a good thing we do much of it. President Roosevelt is following his notable movement for conserving natural resources with another, which is to have the attention of a distinguished conference in Washington next week, in the interests of neglected and defective children. That is admirable. It will be one of the many good things which will make the administration of Roosevelt prominent in the history of the country. But we must go still further. We must take up the claims of the overwhelming number of children who are reasonably normal and not very destitute. We must conserve their time, their mental and manual efficiency and their morals. We must have them all recorded and see that every one has the benefit of his birthright. We must exercise more control. We must see that every one is trained to read and write and prepared for some vocation by which he can make a living. Then there will not be so many degenerates and waifs in the next generation or in the one after that.

There seems to be little room for issues of fact or differences of opinion among us. In college vocabulary, we offer to all the people more wide-open electives in our educational system from top to bottom, and require less, than does any other country. They offer less and require more than we do. They certainly get more in a circumscribed but exact elementary training universally diffused than we do. We shall withdraw no offerings; we shall doubtless make more. But that is not enough. In the moral interests of boys and girls, in the interests of industrial prosperity, in the interests of the Republic and in the interests of democracy and freedom in the world we are bound not only to see that every child can read and write, but to follow him until he has the chance to enter upon a vocation which will make him respectable and of worth to the world.

In the advance of our educational system we have not maintained the balance. The unequal chance, the fallacious outlook, works injustice to multitudes of people and to many industries. Our education should put a premium upon work of hand. It is the only way to enlarge the open chance without confusing and misleading boys and girls.

We should all stand for laws establishing better and safer conditions for labor, and particularly for laws which try to keep greed from robbing children of their American birthright. But when we exclude children from work, we must include them in the schools.

Too much work is bad, but too much idleness is infinitely worse. The schools are bound to be of a kind and character which will enable them to count organized labor among their strongest supports.

We are in the midst of a great task. We are working out the basis and the details of the greatest industrial democracy in human history. Let us lose nothing of our good humor. Let us abate nothing of our confidence and our courage. Let us prove that our indifference is more apparent than real. Let us tone down our conceits and our boasting. Let us cultivate toleration of opinion and be generous in our estimates. Let us think straight, with an open mind, expecting to give and take and come to common conclusions. Let us use our political power without fear when with good purpose. Let us say nothing for mere novelty; nothing to catch the eye of a newspaper which scares itself for revenue only. Let us go on exercising more and more control in the interests of decency and thrift, and making the forces of righteousness more aggressive than the forces of evil dare to be.

There is no need of misgivings. What is upon us was bound to come. We should have expected it, and we can handle it. When the moral sense of the nation is once stirred it acts quickly and forcefully. A democracy with the finest possibilities for every one is better than a monarchy which, in one way or another keeps a whole people in bondage. Of course, there are difficulties. It is harder for a people to agree together and execute their purpose than for a monarch or minister who reckons not with the popular mind to settle things. But even old Talleyrand declared that public opinion was mightier than any monarch who ever lived. We have broken out roads and we will break out more. We will consider until we conclude what to have done, and then we will not be so squeamish about vesting executive officers with the power to carry it out. Our plan of government has already justified its being. It will do so more completely. When it has solved our problems upon a basis of reason and of right, as it will, the people will be the happier and the state the stronger, because in our education we shall be better balanced; in our industries we shall be more efficient, and in our politics and our religion we shall be more free.